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British Party Election Broadcasts (2001, 2005 and 2010): Ideological Framing, Storytelling, Individualisation

David Haigron

1 Post-war television has established itself as the dominant medium of political communication. In 2010, it was still cited as the privileged source of information about the ongoing general election campaign.[1] Since their creation in 1951, Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) have therefore enabled British parties to reach the largest possible audience.[2] Other television formats tend admittedly to be favoured: current affairs programmes, interviews or debates (including the leaders' debates first introduced in 2010). Parties nevertheless continue to invest large amounts of money in the making of PEBs and the latter still afford them the opportunity to deliver their message direct to the public without any interference by their opponents or any editing by the broadcasters.[3]

2 PEBs have progressively adopted advertising production techniques, in terms of style (slogans, jingles, editing, etc.) but also in terms of conception (target audience identified by opinion surveys, pre-screening to focus groups, etc.). In this respect, the Conservative Party's advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi, played a pioneer role in bringing its "aggressive advertising style to politics" and turning PEBs into "long commercials rather than short films".[4] This evolution is often interpreted as a reflection of the ' Americanisation' of British political campaigns.[5] Content analysis studies carried out on the 2001, 2005 and 2010 PEBs yet reveal that, although there has been greater focus on party leaders and emotional appeal, British productions remain, on the whole, more issue-oriented than personality-oriented, and more inclined to self-praise than attacks.[6] P aid political advertising is unlawful in the UK and the broadcasters have repeatedly turned down the parties' requests for shorter PEBs on the grounds that it would be "too reminiscent of instant packaging of political policies".[7] Party broadcasts are therefore officially considered as 'programmes', even though the Electoral Commission "urge[s] parties to be innovative in their design and production of PPBs".[8]

3 This article concentrates on this latter aspect to study how PPBs combine two seemingly opposite elements. On the one hand, they are "clearly labelled as a motivated, partisan piece of political communication".[9] On the other, they are conceived to be as little disruptive as possible in a general flow of entertainment and information. PEBs have therefore integrated TV codes and culture so as to try and blend with the media background. They have borrowed from other mainstream genres, such as advertisements, soap operas, documentaries, fiction films or reality TV programmes, and use similar representational codes to produce a dynamic discourse: 'mirror effect', narrative techniques, character creation, individualization, etc.

4 This article describes the communication strategy and the persuasive techniques used in the PEBs produced by the three main parties (Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats) at the general elections of 2001, 2005 and 2010.[10] It follows a semiotic approach and studies these programmes in terms of television genres.[11] It shall first examine how audio-visual communication, through representation and the construction of a distorted mirror, is used by parties to impose their ideological framework. It shall then concentrate on the dramatization of issues, and show how emotions are mobilised to maximise message recalls. Finally it shall argue that this type of programmes tends to focus on individuals (party leaders, celebrities or 'ordinary heroes') not only for communication purposes but also for ideological reasons.

Ideological Projection and Self-Identification: Framing the Mirror

5 At electoral times, television "helps to shape and define the national campaign by acting as a funnel: broadcasters collect the material and rearrange it for the benefit of the national audience".[12] Their editorial line may however be at variance with the parties' communication strategies and they are likely to produce dissonant messages. On the one hand, the broadcasters "strive to impose a structure on the materials [...] which reflects *their* perception of how the most outstanding elements can be fitted into the day's election jigsaw".[13] On the other, the parties use their free airtime to try and impose *their* agenda (one speaks of 'agenda setting') and to produce an image of society that reflects their own ideological view of it. The characters and the situations shown in the PEBs are therefore shaped by a normative vision of society, even though the party may claim that its policies are based on common sense, not on dogma (this was especially true in the 2005 Conservative series). The target audience is expected to acknowledge this image as a true reflection of their reality and concerns, and to see in those characters a genuine mirror of their own selves. The aim is to circumscribe a 'rhetoric community' that includes the target electorate and the party defending its interests. All the elements of the broadcasts (characters, setting, props, situations, music, message, slogans, etc.) are signs that the viewers are invited to decode. Their reading is however biased by prior beliefs and political sympathies.[14] In semiotic terms, "the ascription of meaning consists in *mapping* semantic fields onto textual items and patterns" and implies "selective projection according to prior coordinates".[15] In other words, the interpretation of PEBs is conditioned by ideology — understood as the frame of mind within which the real is apprehended. In the context of political communication, ideology refers to the core values that shape the party's identity, to the main values conveyed by the mass media, and to the collective values shared by the viewers/voters. Ideological codes therefore

play an important role in structuring the narratives and the characters in PEBs. Viewers should be able to identify with them in a more or less rational way since watching a party broadcast mobilises both the viewers' knowledge and affects. At the level of the individual receiver, ideology therefore corresponds to "cognitive and affective maps on the one hand, and modes of self-identification on the other".[16] This is why party broadcasts rely on devices that guide the viewer's reading in the desired way in connection with the general strategy adopted by the party.

6 To that aim, the message may be general and rather vague to allow the largest part of the audience to agree to it. In 2001, Labour's first PEB portrayed a cheerful Britain and announced that "the work [went] on" to the beat of *The Lighthouse Family*'s pop song "Lifted". In 2010, Scottish actor David Tennant used a 'speaker-inclusive we' to invite people to renew their faith in the outgoing majority: "We've been through tough times but, by staying on the right road, we can make Britain a country we all want it to be" (12/04/10). The focus is on the party, which puts itself forward as the representative and the reassuring protector of the nation's interests. When the message is aimed at a particular group, the attention will shift to some representatives of the target electorate.

7 British PEBs most frequently feature 'ordinary' professionals filmed in their familiar setting: a dedicated nurse or teacher praising the government's achievements in health or education (Labour, 01/06/01), a small business owner claiming that taxes prevent him from creating jobs (Conservative, 13/04/10).[17] Such characterizations assume that nurses and teachers are traditional Labour voters, and show that the Conservatives see themselves as primarily business-friendly. Gaining the favour of an opponent's supporters can be a complementary strategy. An identification process is also at work but the characters endorsing the party's message are usually not perceived as supporters. Labour started courting the business world in the 1990s and, in 2005, the incumbent government's cause was defended by Sir Alan Sugar, a corporate manager and a TV celebrity playing his own role in *The Apprentice*, a reality TV show aired on BBC1 (3/05/05). For their part, the Conservatives opted for a similar strategy with teachers and ethnic minority groups.[18] In these examples, the characters' physical appearances, clothes, accents, and environments enable the viewers to identify them and possibly to identify with them. The production style of the PEBs in which they appear adds another dimension that may also influence how the message is received. Some broadcasts are reminiscent of the style of reality TV (with people on the move addressing a hand-held camera) or documentaries (with people standing still, answering an interviewer who is off-screen). In 2001, Labour's last PEB featured Terri Dwyer and Gary Lucy, two actors starring in *Hollyoaks*, a popular soap opera amongst young people. In this PEB, the characters decide to turn the TV off and go to the polling station, though "it's not always the most fun thing to do". It is obviously no coincidence that *Hollyoaks*'s audience was also the target of the party message. The choice of the soap opera genre seems all the more relevant since it distinguishes itself by its specific narrative and by its sense of "newness" that "invites the viewer to 'live' the experience of solving the enigma, rather than be told the process of its already achieved and recorded solution".[19] This perfectly suits election broadcasts as the future (the election outcome) still remains to be written by the viewers/voters, and it offers "a more engaged and empowering reading relation" than other forms of narratives since the viewers are asked to take part in the writing process.[20] It also reveals that PEBs are conceived as proper TV programmes and not as mere communication vehicle. As such they have attracted renowned film directors (motivated

by their political sympathies and/or the artistic challenge) and have inspired a series of spoofs.[21]

Dynamic Narratives and TV Culture: Fear and Laughing in Westminster

8 As any other television genre (series, commercials, films, documentaries, etc.), PEBs rely on 'narratives' (stories) involving 'actants' (characters and meaning-bearing environments) interacting with one another (in a cooperative or conflicting way) in various situations (usually a problem to solve or a quest to achieve). As seen in the examples above, the mirror image designed by the parties in their PEBs offers different facets of the 'Self' according to their communication strategy. But the communication model would remain incomplete without a further element meant to create some dialectic dynamics. In his study of Russian folktales, Vladimir Propp identified a narrative structure that could be found in any story, as well as a given number of role characters.[22] Frank Biocca drew inspiration from Propp's work to analyse American political commercials and identify their 'actants', be they human (the candidate, the worker, the taxpayer, etc.) or non-human (the White House symbolising the executive power, the Bear representing Russia, etc.).[23] These reading guidelines also apply to British election broadcasts as they often tell the story of a 'hero' (a representative of the target electorate) going out on a 'quest' (buying his own house, demanding better social services, etc.). In doing so, he is helped by 'supporters' or 'helpers' (the party defending his interests, opinion leaders legitimating his cause, etc.) and is hindered by 'villains' (the other parties, pressure groups, foreign powers, etc.).

9 The first 2001 Conservative PEB reiterated the argument that Labour's lenient approach to law and order was responsible for a rise in criminality, and attacked the government's early prison release scheme. It showed convicts being let out of jail only to commit further offences: drug dealing, burglary, mugging, etc. The gloomy music and the use of black and white recalled the infamous 'Willie Horton' spot produced by the Republicans in 1988 to discredit the Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis.[24] In terms of narrative, the Conservative Party poses itself as the 'helper' who warns the 'hero' (the electorate) of the threat posed by the 'villain' (the government associated with the criminals). This type of broadcasts mainly relies on emotion rather than logic or ethic.[25] Fear is often used as a psychological lever in party broadcast narratives in a similar way as it is used in other genres.[26] In TV commercials for instance, fear is created to draw people's attention on a threat they might be unaware of. The party — or the advertiser — can then suggest a remedy to thwart this menace so as to maintain the status quo or improve the situation. Communication may also rely on deliberate exaggeration, or refer to other television or cinematographic genres so as to create a familiar audio-visual environment.

10 In 2001, Labour attacked the Conservatives on a theme that had long been acknowledged as the Right's 'comparative advantage', *i.e.* managing the economy (23/05/01). The broadcast was entitled *Tory Policies Will Hurt*. Its introduction was in the style of a horror film trailer and multiplied visual references to this cinema genre. It opened up on a dark tunnel bearing resemblance to the setting of George Lucas's 1971 science fiction movie *THX 1138*. "They're back", a deep masculine voice warned, as pictures of senior Tory members were blown away by the wind. It then referred to "Economic Disaster: The Tory

Years," as though it were a motion picture and announced "a series of sequels even more terrifying" to be released: *Towering Interest Rates* and *The Repossessed* featuring William Hague (then leader of the Conservative Party) and Michael Portillo (then Shadow Chancellor) as zombies. The broadcast described the apocalyptic future that awaited Britain should the Opposition be returned to power. The threat was materialised by a dark shadow looming over a street where a panicked crowd ran for shelter. One of the scenes focused on a little girl wearing a pink coat in an almost monochromatic environment, thereby reminding film aficionados of *Schindler's List* (1993) in which Steven Spielberg also made use of this technique. On a political plane, this clearly hinted at the economic downturn of the early 1990s and at the house repossessions that followed and were still fresh in people's memory. On a cinematographic level, it also made references to classic 1960s and 1970s blockbusters such as George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), John Guillermin and Irwin Allen's *The Towering Inferno* (1974) or Jeremy Thorpe's *The Possessed* (1977). This broadcast stands out for its originality. It was also conceived to try and create a sense of bonding between the sender (the Labour Party) and the receivers (the viewers/voters), like the one that exists among film connoisseurs.[27]

11 Finally, humour can also be mobilised to mock other parties, or to create a relaxed atmosphere in which the message might be better received. In this respect, two of the PEBs produced by the Liberal Democrats in 2005 came over as rather innovative. The first one (17/04/05) featured two second-hand car dealers verging on the crooked: "Blair's Bangers" selling red cars and "Michael's Motors" blue ones. Both sellers defended the Labour or Conservative policies displayed on their vehicles' windshields in blatant bad faith. This presentation made fun of the two major parties and their respective leaders — Labour's Tony Blair and the Conservatives' Michael Howard — and pointed out what the Lib Dems saw as empty promises. The second broadcast (01/05/05) drew its inspiration from Aesop's fable *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. The main character (played by a young actor wearing a red tie) had convinced "the boy who lived across the road," Howey (played by a boy with a blue tie), that a wolf lived in the forest. Everyone stopped believing him when he continued to claim there still existed a "wolf-like menace", even after "the local woodsman Hans" had conducted a thorough search in vain. The references to Tony Blair (the Prime Minister), Michael Howard (the leader of the opposition), Hans Blix (the chief UN weapons inspector) and the unfruitful search for weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein's Iraq were obvious to the viewers. The Lib Dems were trying to capitalise on the fact that they had always opposed the most unpopular British intervention in Iraq. The purpose however is not so much to convince with arguments but to hammer a point home and use humour to maximise the memory impact of the message. The PEB addresses a 'laughing community', and the figure of the ridiculed 'Other' helps define that of the 'Self'.

12 In the aforementioned examples, the tone may be different, but the message is largely negative in the sense that the qualities of the party are mostly revealed when compared to the others' defaults. Previous studies have concluded that negative ads were more emotionally engaging and were therefore more likely to be watched, understood and remembered.[28] Emotional content, in general, may even enhance the credibility of the message.[29] Personal attacks are not as systematic as in US political ads, but in 2005, the leaders' personalities became a campaign issue. In a PEB entitled "Remember?" (15/04/05), Labour reminded voters of Michael Howard's participation in Margaret Thatcher's and John Major's Cabinets, while the Conservatives urged the electorate to

"[s]end Mr. Blair a message" (26/04 and 2/05/05). Negative campaigns and personal attacks have not become the rule, but one can observe a tendency to personalise issues, parties and campaigns. This may be related to television itself as a medium "better suited to the projection of personality than to the discussion of complex ideas", for producers tend to promote "the most authoritative 'main player'."[30] Television singles out 'personalities': a charismatic leader or an ordinary hero. Group confrontation and the notion of 'social categories' thus give way, in the political discourse, to individual relationships and responsibilities in a context of 'storytelling'.

Individualisation: The Charismatic Leader and the Ordinary Hero

13 The presidentialization of British politics has already been studied and more recent works have pointed out that electoral campaigns have now entered a post-modern era in which *broadcasting* is progressively giving way to *narrowcasting* and to a more personalised form of communication via Internet social networks, text messages, direct mail, etc.[31] Television, however, still remains the major vehicle for general political messages. The common point of these analyses is to shed light on the 'individualization' of political communication. This goes both ways. On the one hand, leaders try to single themselves out and to appear charismatic, popular, authoritative, accountable, transpartisan, etc. On the other, anonymous members of the public tend to be put in the limelight at electoral times to tell their own personal stories.

14 As cultural goods produced for and within a given society, television programmes are 'consumed' by a large proportion of the population. The broadcasters' offer is usually meant to satisfy the majority's tastes and expectations, and political parties are generally worried that too much innovation might blur their message.[32] Most programmes (including PEBs) therefore conform to the cultural codes shared by this majority. In this respect, television acts more as "a mirror reflecting our own reality back to us" than as "a transparent window on the world".[33] The 'uses and gratifications' theory posits that mass media such as television are mainly used to fulfil basic psychological needs.[34] Individuals watch television for information but also to entertain themselves and to experience emotional and aesthetic feelings, in search of a communion in which they may integrate a larger community. In other words, they actually take part in a collective action while watching television from the privacy of their living room. Television (through its programmes) creates a virtual space — *i.e.* a dematerialized social sphere — where groups can be gathered (the Internet and its social networking forums are obviously a more recent, more personalised and proactive extension of this phenomenon). Viewers are addressed as individuals but are also invited to join in a group.

15 The 'talking head' format perfectly illustrates this apparent paradox.[35] Though meant to simulate a face-to-face exchange, this form of communication remains unidirectional and soliloquial, and is seen as very formal. In more recent productions, hand-held cameras are more readily used to follow the party leaders in their daily activities, be they professional or personal. Inspired by new television filming techniques (much used in reality TV shows), the camera endows the viewers with the illusory feeling that they can engage in a personal relationship with the leader, that they can follow him/her almost everywhere, and that nothing can be hidden from them. This is mostly accompanied by

the use of a first-person narrative. By way of example, one may cite the third Labour broadcast of the 2001 campaign (27/05/01). It focused on Tony Blair and was shot in a school in his constituency of Sedgefield (Co. Durham) by commercials director Jack Price. The Prime Minister speaks to someone off-camera who is neither seen nor heard. This places the viewer in the position of a privileged witness without being directly addressed, as though he/she were left to make up his/her own mind. Tony Blair uses the "we" form to refer to the government but this only seems to be an extension of the first-person pronoun. Above all, his speech illustrates what is at stake in political communication, *i.e.* to create a causal link between programmatic words and concrete achievements. Television's "dual impact" totally serves this effect as the "camera [is] used to carry a visual representation of the message in support of the audio portion".[36] The images show what the words announce. "I wouldn't stay in politics a day longer than I thought I had some useful purpose in it", Tony Blair reveals before being filmed in the schoolyard talking with a teacher, surrounded by pupils. He insists on the government's achievements — "You can come to a school like this and it's changed. And it's changed because of the political decisions" — and concludes that "there are real changes that we can see that have made a real difference to people's lives".

16 In this example, the leader is portrayed as someone endowed with specific powers. This often goes together with a more 'human' side. In order to gain popularity, he must appear close to 'ordinary people'. In 2005, Michael Howard spoke about the state school he went to in Wales, about his mother who was a victim of the Holocaust, and about the death of his mother-in-law who contracted MRSA in hospital (20/04/05). In 2001 and 2005, the Lib Dem series featured a portrait of Charles Kennedy, relating his "political journey" from his early years in rural Scotland to his position of party leader (16/05/01 and 25/04/05). Popular or newly elected leaders looking for further credibility are usually much present in their party's broadcasts. David Cameron and Nick Clegg are cases in point (in 2010 they appeared in all the PEBs, save one, of their respective parties).[37] This exposure can also boost voters' support.[38] It is equally true that an unpopular leader may withdraw from the PEBs. Save for a 2-second succession of shots (21/04/10), Gordon Brown does not appear in any of the 2010 Labour productions. He was replaced by television celebrities including Sean Pertwee, David Tennant, Eddie Izzard, Peter Davison and Ross Kemp.[39]

17 While leaders try to be seen as 'ordinary persons', anonymous citizens are praised as 'everyday heroes'. In 2001, a Labour PEB praised the personal commitment of a nurse, a retired police officer, a teacher and a war veteran, whose names were given. Tony Blair introduced them in a voice-over as "the real heroes, the quiet heroes, who are building the future of Britain" and described them as the "strength and soul of this country" (01/06/01). The Lib Dems used a similar approach in three of their PEBs with testimonies by nurses, pensioners, policemen, teachers, commuters and students (25/05, 29/05 and 03/06/01). More recently, David Cameron's vision of the 'Big Society' was actualised in a broadcast featuring the portraits of a charity shop assistant and of a volunteer, both identified by their first names and places of residence (13/04/10). Such 'actants' contribute to the creation of a 'reality effect' and to an impression of genuineness reminiscent of documentary filmmaking and of the *cinéma vérité* style. They also provide characters and narratives that structure the broadcasts.

18 In ideological terms, this is also coherent with a tendency to 'individualize' responsibilities and to attribute social disorder not to socioeconomic conditions but primarily to individual anti-social behaviour. This is arguably one of the legacies of the

Thatcher years and a reflection that "there is no such thing as society". But New Labour (1997-2010) also played a major role in inducing "a change in the location of responsibility from society to individual" that contributed to alter "the social democratic concept of citizenship".[40] Emphasis was laid on personal responsibility with rights presented "not as entitlements but as things we earn by fulfilling our duties" with the implication "that when the duties are not fulfilled, the failing lies with the individual".[41] This approach relies on counter-models and justifies hard-nosed postures, as exemplified in David Cameron's diatribe against "welfare spongers" (23/04/10).[42]

A Lasting Impression on the Collective Memory

19 Television is "a highly 'generic' medium with comparatively few one-off programmes falling outside established categories" and Party Election Broadcasts are no exception to the rule.[43] They largely borrow from other genres too (soap opera, apocalyptic fiction, comedy, reality TV, documentaries, etc.) so as to constantly be revived and still be able to seize the viewers' attention. At the same time, they must be analysed as vehicles for party propaganda. Communication strategists play on this ambiguity to try and produce entertaining programmes that carry a political message. Following the 1959 Labour series of PEBs, *The Daily Mirror* already commented that "[it] moved so fast, so topically and so entertainingly that many viewers probably forgot they were being appealed to as voters".[44] Should such circumstances be created, political slogans and soundbites are all the more likely to be memorised by the viewers.

20 In 2003, the Electoral Commission indicated that "[a]lthough evidence regarding the influence of PPBs is inconclusive, they remain one of the most effective and therefore most important direct campaigning tools available to qualifying political parties".[45] The voters' attitude towards PEBs is rather ambiguous. Most of them endorse the right of parties to make them and agree they may raise public awareness regarding what parties stand for. On the other hand, they deny PEBs any effect on people's political allegiance and find them little informative.[46] These statements are contradicted by other surveys and the influence of party broadcasts remains open to dispute.[47] While some are doubtful about their very purpose, others argue about their "valuable role [...] in the democratic process".[48] Even though one may doubt about the PEBs' direct influence on voting *behaviour*, one may assume that they can reinforce or modify people's *attitudes* towards a party, or alter their perception of events. With their own broadcasts, political parties participate in the production of the media discourse and, as such, in the creation of a collective imaginary. In this respect they also participate in the writing of British audio-visual history and contribute to enriching the national television archives.[49]

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1:

PEB allocation for the general elections of 2001, 2005 and 2010

PEB allocation in 2001 (polling day: 7/06/01)

Parties	Dates	Title or main theme(s)	Duration
Labour	14/05	The work goes on (feat. Geri Halliwell)	2'40
	23/05	Tory Policies Will Hurt (mock trailer)	2'40
	27/05	Leadership	4'40
	01/06	The Real Heroes (Let's finish what we all started)	2'40
	05/06	Be part of it (making a big difference to people in your community)	2'40

Conservatives	15/05	Labour's special early release scheme / Petrol tax	2'40
	24/05	Education in disarray / Keep the Pound (in Europe, not run by Europe)	2'40
	30/05	Petrol tax / Keep the Pound (in Europe, not run by Europe)	2'40
	02/06	Repeat 15/05	2'40
	04/06	Labour's broken promises / William Hague campaigning	2'40
Lib Dems	16/05	Charles Kennedy: a leader who jumps on injustice, not bandwagons	2'40
	25/05	A real chance for real change: NHS, pensions, police	2'40
	29/05	A real chance for real change: education, transport, tuition fees	2'40
	03/06	A real chance for real change: NHS, tuition fees, police, pensions	2'40

PEB allocation in 2005 (polling day: 5/05/05)

Parties	Dates	Title or main theme(s)	Duration
Labour	11/04	Blair and Brown	4'40
	15/04	Remember?	2'40
	19/04	The NHS expresses fundamental Labour values	3'40
	27/04	If you value it, vote for it	3'40
	03/05	One in ten (feat. Alan Sugar)	3'40
Conservatives	12/04	Choices (speaking up for Britain's forgotten majority)	3'40
	16/04	Repeat 12/04	3'40
	20/04	Values (M. Howard and his team)	3'40
	26/04	Send Mr Blair a message	2'40
	02/05	Repeat 26/04	2'40
Lib Dems	13/04	Our achievements in Scotland and in numerous by-elections	2'40
	17/04	Would you buy a used car off this government?	2'40
	25/04	Charles Kennedy: a political journey	2'40
	01/05	The Boy Who Cried Wolf	2'40

PEB allocation in 2010 (polling day: 6/05/10)

Parties	Dates	Title or main theme(s)	Duration

Labour	14/05	The Road Ahead (feat. Sean Pertwee and David Tennant)	2'40
	16/04	Brilliant Britain (feat. Eddie Izzard)	2'40
	21/04	Our Journey (feat. Peter Davison and David Tennant)	2'40
	28/04	A Nightmare on your Street	2'40
	04/05	Sixty Seconds (feat. Ross Kemp)	2'40
Conservatives	13/04	An Invitation to Join the Government of Britain	4'40
	19/04	What it takes to change a country	4'40
	23/04	The Big Society	4'40
	27/04	An Election Broadcast from the Hung Parliament Party	2'40
	03/05	A contract between the Conservative Party and you	3'40
Lib Dems	14/04	Say goodbye to broken promises	3'40
	20/04	Vote for what you believe in	2'40
	26/04	Say goodbye to broken promises (repeat)	3'40
	30/04	Don't let anyone tell you it can't be different	2'40

Appendix 2:

Total campaign expenditure and amount spent on Party Political Broadcasts*

	Labour		Conservatives		Liberal Democrats	
	Campaign	PPBs	Campaign	PPBs	Campaign	PPBs
2001	£10,945,119	£272,849	£12,751,813	£567,286	£1,361,377	£55,353
2005	£17,946,000	£470,218	£17,852,000	£293,446	£4,325,000	£124,871
2010	£8,016,000	£430,028	£16,683,000	£699,124	£4,788,000	£152,747

Sources: The Electoral Commission, *Election 2001: Campaign Spending* (London: HMSO, 2002); Electoral Commission, *Election 2005: Campaign Spending — The UK Parliamentary General Election* (London: HMSO, 2006); The Electoral Commission, *UK General Election 2010: Campaign Spending Report* (London: HMSO, 2011). See also The Electoral Commission, *The Funding of Political Parties* (London: HMSO, 2003).

* This includes broadcasts aired before the beginning of the official campaign in the year of the election.

Appendix 3:

Dominant tone in the PEBs (2001, 2005 and 2010)

	Labour (out of 5 PEBs)			Conservatives (out of 5 PEBs)			Liberal Democrats (out of 4 PEBs)		
	2001	2005	2010	2001	2005	2010	2001	2005	2010
Self-praise	4	4	4	0	3	4	5	2	2
Including a focus on the leader	1	1	0	0	1	4	1	1	2
Negative	1	1	1	5	2	1	0	2	2
Including attacks on other parties' leaders	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	0

Appendix 4:

Dominant speakers in the PEBs (2001, 2005 and 2010)

	Labour (out of 5 PEBs)*			Conservatives (out of 5 PEBs)*			Liberal Democrats (out of 4 PEBs)*		
	2001	2005	2010	2001	2005	2010	2001	2005	2010
Party leader	2	1	0	1	3	4	4	2	4
Average citizen(s)	0	2	1	0	2	0	3	0	0
Celebrity/celebrities	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
None (fiction, voice-over, music, etc.) or very brief final address	3	1	1	4	2	1	0	2	0

* The total for each column may exceed the number of PEBs allocated when the leader and other speakers are equally present in the broadcast.

NOTES

1. A poll by Opinion Matters for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) showed that 63% of voters used television to get information about the campaign, compared to 47% who read the newspapers, 27% who listened to the radio, and 9% who visited political websites. Cited in *The British General Election of 2010*, ed. Dennis Kavanagh and Philip Cowley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 184.

2. Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) are scheduled during general, local and European election campaigns. Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs) are transmitted outside electoral campaigns, though the expression is also used to refer to all the categories of party broadcasts (election, ministerial,

budget, referendum and political broadcasts). They are allocated to qualifying parties and aired free of charge on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Five and Sky. For further details, see Oonagh Gay, *Party Election Broadcasts* (London: House of Commons Library, SN/PC/03354, 13/01/10) and The Electoral Commission, *Party Political Broadcasting: Report and Recommendations* (London: HMSO, 2003).

3. See appendix for details.

4. The first quotation is by Creative Director Jeremy Sinclair, cited in Martin Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 20. The second one is by Saatchi's Managing Director, Tim Bell, speaking in a documentary on Party Political Broadcasts first aired on 8 October 1993 on BBC2 (*There now follows...* directed by Bob Clifford and Celia Ellacott).

5. For further details on the 'Americanization' of British politics and political communication, see Jennifer van Heerde-Hudson, "The Americanization of British Politics? Trends in Negative Advertising, 1951-2005." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and at the annual meeting of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties Conference, Nottingham, United Kingdom (2006); Karen S. Johnson and Camille Elebash, "The Contagion from the Right: The Americanization of British Political Advertising," in *New Perspectives on Political Advertising*, eds Lynda Lee Kaid, Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986): 293-13; Dennis Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning: The New Marketing of Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 218-27; Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (1995; London: Routledge, 2003), 97.

6. Janine Dermody and Stuart Hanmer-Lloyd, "An Exploratory Analysis of the Message Discourses Employed in the 2010 British Party Election Broadcasts," (2010); Barrie Gunter, Kostas Saltzis and Vincent Campbell, "The Changing Nature of Party Election Broadcasts: The Growing Influence of Political Marketing" (Discussion papers in mass communication, Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester, 2006); Jennifer van Heerde, "Rethinking Issues, Image and Negative Advertising: British Party Election Broadcasts, 2001-2005," (Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 2005); Robin Hodess; Julio Juarez Gamiz, *Political marketing and the production of political communications: A content analysis of British Party Election Broadcasts from 1979 to 2001* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Journalism Studies, University of Sheffield, October 2004).

7. Lord Annan et al., *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (London: HMSO, 1977), 298. Since 2000, parties have been able to choose from broadcasts of 2'40, 3'40, or 4'40: Gay, *Party Election Broadcasts*. In 2005, Labour's request for 30-second spots was rejected by the Electoral Commission: *The British General Election of 2005*, eds Dennis Kavanagh and David Butler (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 111.

8. The Electoral Commission, *Party Political Broadcasting: Report and Recommendations*, 4.

9. McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, 31.

10. See appendix for details.

11. Every element of the broadcast (captions, speeches, images, music, sounds, etc.) constitutes a 'sign' (or 'signifier') to which a meaning ('signified') is to be ascribed in a given cultural context (the linguistic, political, socioeconomic, ideological, etc. environment). The message is 'co-constructed' insofar as the receivers (viewers/voters) must decode the signs produced by the sender (the party) to make sense of the said message. *Television and Political Advertising*, vol. 2: *Signs, Codes and Images*, ed. Frank Biocca (Hillsdale, New Jersey: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1991). See further references below.

12. Ralph Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), 181.

13. Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication* (London: Routledge, 1995), 134, authors' emphasis.

14. Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Message," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, eds Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 138.
15. David Bordwell, *Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 129, author's emphasis. The expressions "texts" and "textual items" are to be understood in their broader meaning, *i.e.* as "a signifying structure composed of signs and codes which are essential to communicate". James Watson and Anne Hill, *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 2003), 317.
16. Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (1991; London: Sage, 1994), 23.
17. Scenes showing anonymous voters addressing the camera to praise the party or incriminate its opponents are a common feature in PEBs (these shots are known as 'vox pops'). This type of sequences was used in 10 broadcasts (almost 24%) of our corpus.
18. One of their 2005 PEBs featured a teacher, a black man in a suit and a young woman of Indian origin (12/04/05). A few months later, Adam Afriyie, their first black MP (Windsor), took the lead in the party's first post-election PPB (4/10/05).
19. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (1987; London: Routledge, 1991), 145.
20. Fiske, *Television Culture*, 145.
21. In 2001, Jack Price (who had filmed commercials for Nike) made the Labour PEB focusing on Tony Blair's leadership, Stephen Daldry (*Billy Elliot*, *The Hours*) worked on Charles Kennedy's portrait for the Lib Dems, and Ken Loach directed the Socialist Alliance's PEB. In 2005, Labour's opening broadcast with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown was filmed by Anthony Minghella (*The English Patient*). The same year, *Channel 4 News* aired three spoof PEBs produced by advertising agency Quiet Storm and directed by two of its creative, Lee Ford and Dan Brooks. In 2010, Labour hired Stephen Hopkins (*24*, *Nightmare on Elm Street 5*) for one of their PEBs.
22. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). See also Algirdas-Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at Method* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) and Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1977).
23. *Television and Political Advertising*, ed. Biocca, 79.
24. Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates, *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television* (1984; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 277-81.
25. J. van Heerde, "Rethinking Issues, Image and Negative Advertising: British Party Election Broadcasts, 2001-2005," 10.
26. Michael Ray and William Wilkie, "Fear: The Potential of an Appeal Neglected by Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 34 1 (1970): 55-56.
27. The idea was reiterated in 2010 with a PEB entitled *A Nightmare on your Street* (aired on 28/04/10), a clear reference to the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series of horror films, one of which was directed by Stephen Hopkins, who was recruited to shoot the aforementioned Labour PEB (see footnote 21).
28. Janine Dermody and Richard Scullion, "Exploring the Consequences of Negative Political Advertising for Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Political Marketing*, 2 1 (2003): 77-100. For a review of research studies on this topic, see J. Dermody and S. Hanmer-Lloyd, "An Exploratory Analysis of the Message Discourses Employed in the 2010 British Party Election Broadcasts," 1-2. See appendix for details.
29. B. Gunter et al., "The Changing Nature of Party Election Broadcasts: The Growing Influence of Political Marketing," 12-14; Aron O'Cass, "Political Advertising Believability and Information Source Value during Elections," *Journal of Advertising*, 31 1(2002): 63-74.
30. Anthony Mughan, *Media and the Presidentialization of Parliamentary Elections* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 12.

31. Michael Foley, *The Rise of the British Presidency* (Manchester: MUP, 1993); Mughan, *Media and the Presidentialization of Parliamentary Elections*; Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb, *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); David Farrell, Robin Kolodny and Stephen Medvic, "Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6 4 (2001): 11-30; David Farrell, "Campaign Modernization and the West European Party," in *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges*, eds Kurt Richard Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 63-83.

32. Kevin Maher, "Campaign Trail Star: Politicians are Roping in A-list Directors to Boost their Campaigns," *The Times* (28/04 2005); Margaret Scammell and Ana Langer, "Political Advertising: Why Is It So Boring?" *Media, Culture & Society*, 28 5 (2006): 763-84.

33. Fiske, *Television Culture*, 21.

34. Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz, *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (London: Sage, 1974). One of the earliest studies carried out on PEBs was based on this theory: Jay G. Blumler and Denis McQuail, *Television in Politics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968).

35. The speaker is filmed in close shot so that he/she has approximately the same size as a person sitting in front of the viewer would have. He/she looks straight into the eye of the camera, reads from an autocue and addresses the audience as "you".

36. Stephen C. Shadegg, *How to Win an Election: The Art of Political Victory* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1964), 168. See also Annie Lang, "Defining Audio/Video Redundancy from a Limited Capacity Information Processing Perspective," *Communication Research*, 22 1 (1995): 86-115.

37. See appendix for details.

38. Daniel Stevens, Jeffrey A. Karp and Robert Hodgson, "Party Leaders as Movers and Shakers in British Campaign? Results from the 2010 Election," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 21 2 (2011): 137.

39. Labour has produced other PEBs with endorsements from celebrities: though furtive, ex-Spice Girl Geri Halliwell's appearance in one of their 2001 broadcasts attracted much media attention, and so did their first 2010 PEB featuring Sean Pertwee (on-screen) and former *Dr Who* David Tennant (voice-over). Anne Perkins, "It's raining celebs as Geri backs Blair," *The Guardian* (14/05/10); "General Election 2010: David Tennant and Sean Pertwee star in Labour advert", *The Daily Telegraph* (12/04/10).

40. Mark Bevir, *New Labour: A Critique* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 69. See also *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, eds Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (London: Sage, 2002); *The Conservative Party and Social Policy*, ed. Hugh Bochel (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011); Florence Faucher-King and Patrick Le Galès, *The New Labour Experiment: Change and Reform under Blair and Brown* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford UP, 2010); Bill Jordan, *Why the Third Way Failed: Economics, Morality and the Origins of the "Big Society"* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010).

41. Bevir, *New Labour: A Critique*, 69.

42. The PEB uses footage of a speech by David Cameron in which he states: "[...] people who can work, people who are able to work and people who choose not to work: you cannot go on claiming welfare like you are now."

43. Fiske, *Television Culture*, 109.

44. Quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. 5: *Competition, 1955-1974* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 251.

45. The Electoral Commission, *Party Political Broadcasting: Report and Recommendations*, 4.

46. Jane Sancho, *Election 2001 Viewers' Response to the Television Coverage* (London: ITC Research Publication, 2001), 19-20.
47. Paul Baines et al., "Measuring Communication Channel Experiences and their Influence on Voting in the 2010 British General Election," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27 7-8 (2011): 691-717; Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston, "Assessing the Television Campaign: The Impact of Party Election Broadcasting on Voters Opinions in the 1997 British General Election," *Political Communications*, 19 (2002): 333-58; David Sanders and Pippa Norris, "The Impact of Political Advertising in the 2001 UK General Election," *Political Research Quarterly*, 58 4 (2005): 525-36; Richard Scullion and Janine Dermody, "The Value of Party Election Broadcasts for Electoral Engagement: A Content Analysis of the 2001 British General Election Campaign," *International Journal of Advertising*, 24 3 (2005): 345-72.
48. J. Dermody and S. Hanmer-Lloyd, "An Exploratory Analysis of the Message Discourses Employed in the 2010 British Party Election Broadcasts," 1.
49. PEBs and PEBs are kept at the British Film Institute. A selection of them can be viewed on the BFI website (http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1389732/index.html). The Edward Boyle Library of the University of Leeds also has a collection of party broadcasts, and the website of the University of Sheffield provides access to a corpus of PEBs (http://pebs.group.shef.ac.uk/).

ABSTRACTS

As the majority of programmes aired on British terrestrial channels, Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) address a large and anonymous audience. In order to reach specific viewers however, they rest on stereotyped representational codes meant to enable target voters to identify with the characters and the situations portrayed. The mirror presented to them is necessarily distorted to fit within the party's ideological framework and to serve its electoral ambition. This article examines the representational codes at work in the PEBs produced by the three main British political parties at the general elections of 2001, 2005 and 2010. How are those codes manipulated to produce a dynamic (audio-visual) discourse? How is dramatisation used to engage the audience and enhance message recall? How do PEBs reflect the personification of issues and the individualisation of the social body?

INDEX

Keywords: Party Election Broadcast (PEB), political communication, television genre, narrative, identification

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